

NationalJournalLeadershipCouncil



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**Building a Best-in-Class Storytelling  
Capability for Your Organization**

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# Spoiler Alert...

## Hollywood's Storytelling Formula

### The Hero's Journey

#### THE STAGES OF THE HERO'S JOURNEY

The hero is introduced in his ORDINARY WORLD where he receives the CALL TO ADVENTURE. He is RELUCTANT at first to CROSS THE FIRST THRESHOLD where he eventually encounters TESTS, ALLIES and ENEMIES. He reaches the INNERMOST CAVE where he endures the SUPREME ORDEAL. He SEIZES THE SWORD or the treasure and is pursued on the ROAD BACK to his world. He is RESURRECTED and transformed by his experience. He RETURNS to his ordinary world with a treasure, boon, or ELIXIR to benefit his world.

### Replaceable Parts

Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone.  
Star Wars A New Hope; synopsis

Harry Potter

~~Luke Skywalker~~ is an orphan living with his uncle and aunt on the remote wilderness of ~~Tatooine~~:

He is rescued from ~~aliens~~ by wise, bearded ~~Ben Kenobi~~, who turns out to be a ~~Jedi Knight~~:

~~Ben~~ reveals to ~~Luke~~ that ~~Luke's~~ father was also a ~~Jedi Knight~~, and was the best pilot he had ever seen.

~~Luke~~ is also instructed in how to use the ~~Jedi~~ light sabre as he too trains to become a ~~Jedi~~.

~~Luke~~ has many adventures in the ~~galaxy~~ and makes new friends such as ~~Han Solo~~ and ~~Princess Leia~~.

In the course of these adventures he distinguishes himself as a top ~~X-wing pilot~~ in the battle of the ~~Death Star~~, making the ~~direct hit~~ that secures the ~~rebels~~ victory against the forces of evil, ~~Slytherin~~.

~~Luke~~ also sees off the threat of ~~Darth Vader~~, who we know murdered his uncle and aunt.

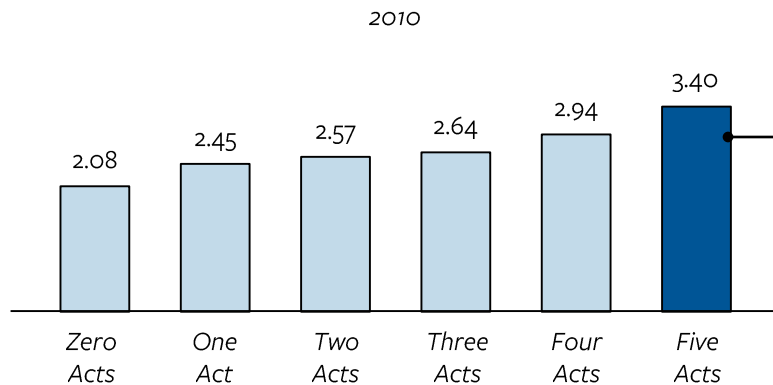
In the finale, ~~Luke~~ and his new friends receive medals of valour.

All of this will be set to an orchestral score composed by John Williams.

# Unpacking Storytelling's Appeal

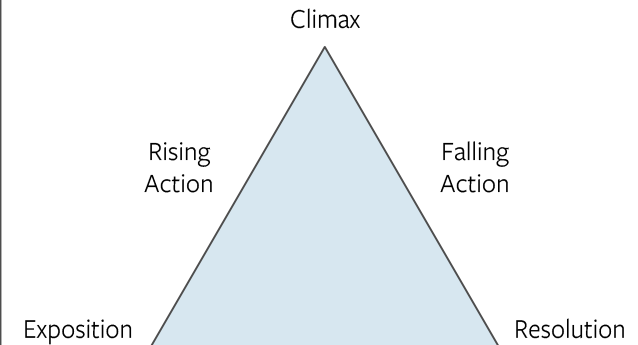
## *Audiences Rewarding More Developed Story Structure*

**2010 Spotbowl.com Mean Ad Favorability Rating Increased as the Number of Acts Present in the Ad Increased<sup>1</sup>**



### **Conventional Five-Part Dramatic Structure Still Most Effective Model**

*"Freytag's Pyramid"*



### **Study in Brief**



#### **"What Makes a Super Bowl Ad Super?"**

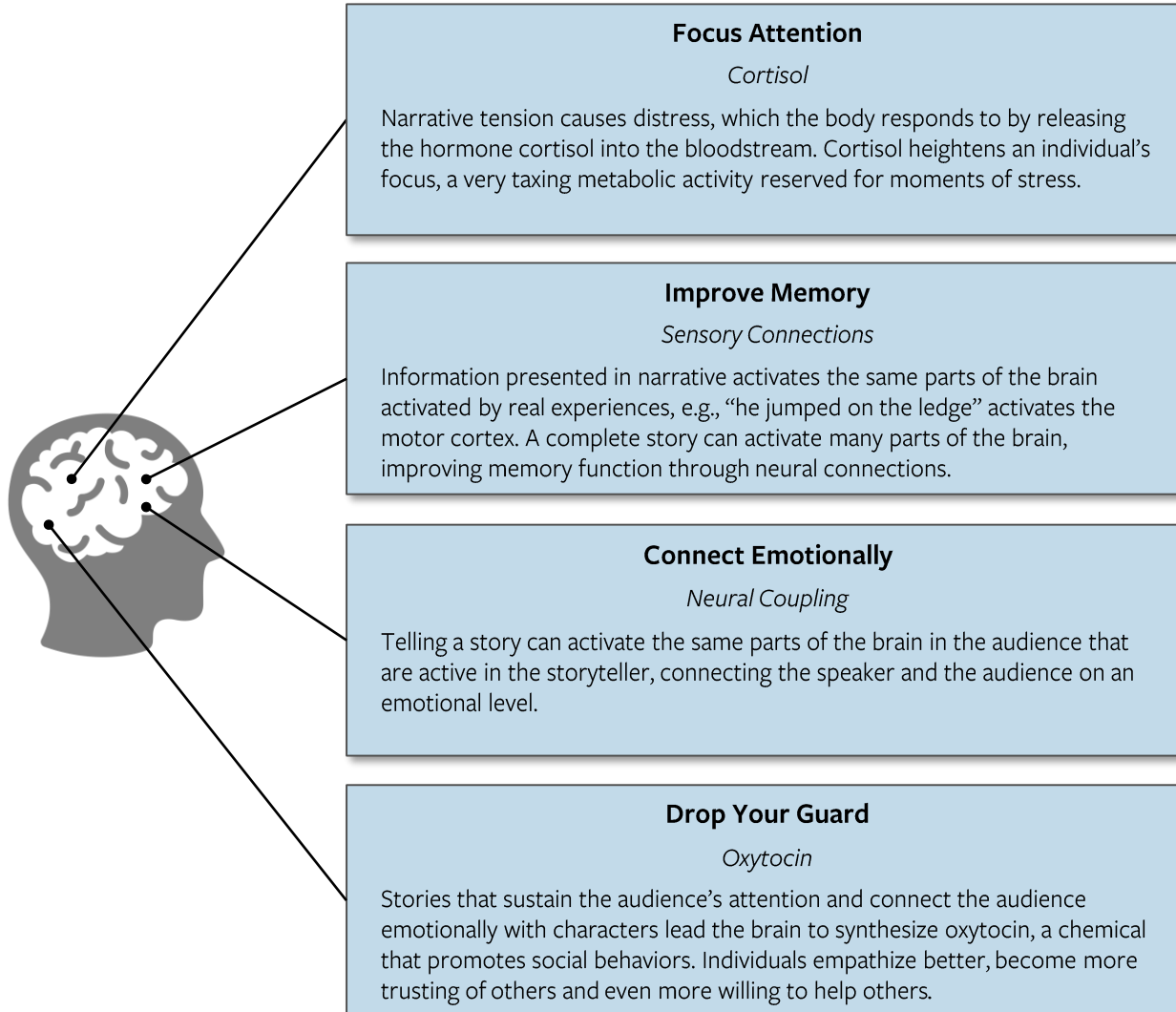
#### **Five-Act Dramatic Form Affects Consumer Super Bowl Advertising Ratings<sup>1</sup>**

- Marketing researchers measured 100+ Super Bowl ads in 2010, 2011 for number of narrative acts and presence of humor, sex appeal, emotion, animals
- Higher number of acts correlated with higher ratings in SpotBowl.com and *USA Today* Ad Meter national ratings polls; other factors exhibited no discernable pattern

<sup>1</sup> "What Makes a Super Bowl Ad Super? Five-Act Dramatic Form Affects Consumer Super Bowl Advertising Ratings," Keith Quesenberry and Michael Coolson, 2014.

# Brains Primed for Story

## Neuro-Economists Uncovering Story's Physiological Power



### Bullet Points Beware



Audiences are not well-suited to remember information presented outside of a structured story narrative; they instead tend to remember just the first and last pieces of information.

# Extracting the Bare Essentials

## *What Makes a Story a Story?*

### Built Out of These Key Components...

Story Component		Translation
<i>(Human) Context</i>	➡	A person or community
<i>Goal</i>	➡	What they want to achieve
<i>Conflict</i>	➡	What is stopping them from achieving it
<i>Plot</i>	➡	How they tried another way to achieve it
<i>Resolution</i>	➡	How they changed (for better or for worse)

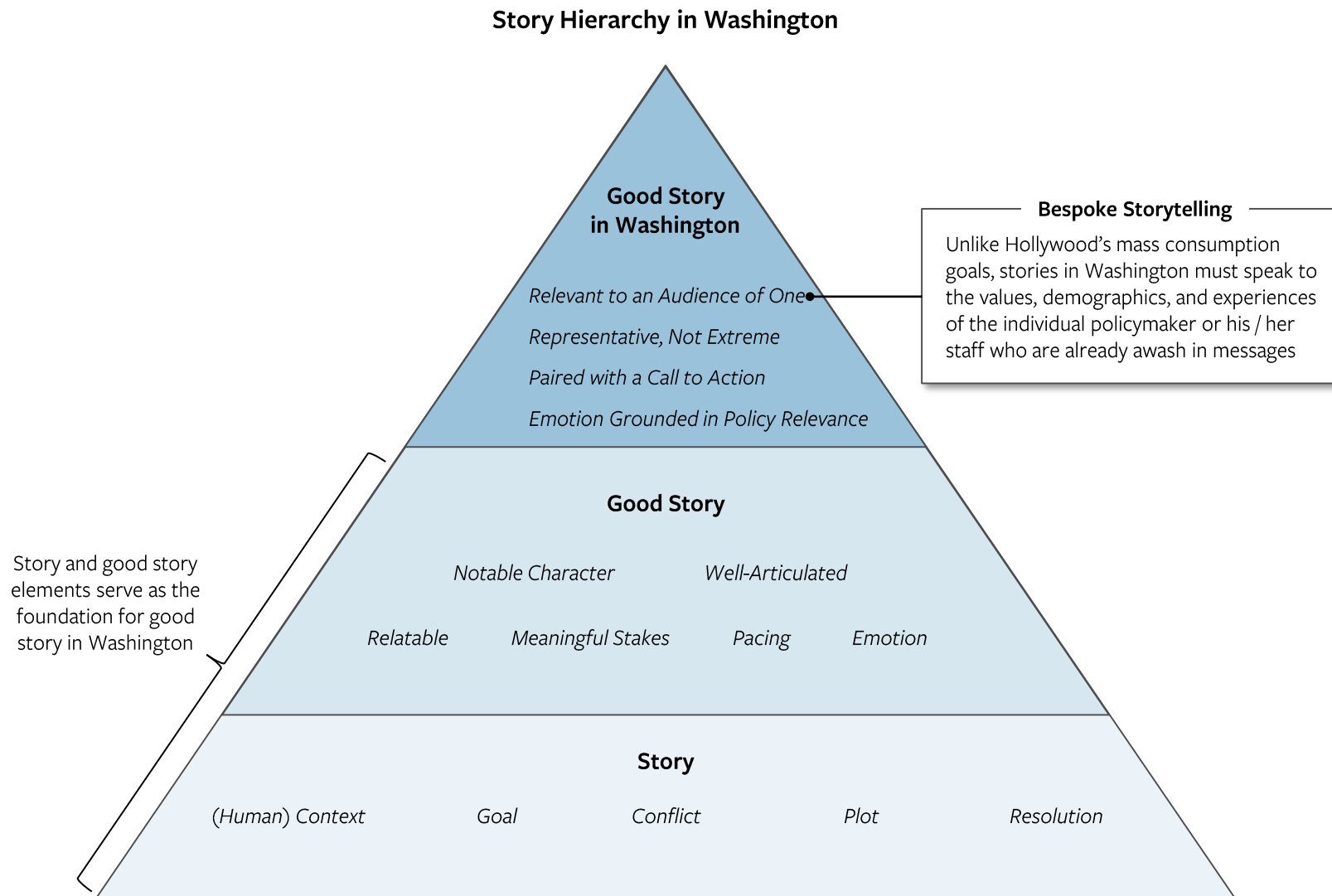
Longer stories compile many smaller stories, building up to a grand resolution of the story's central conflict

### And Not to Be Confused with...

<b>Narrative</b> Account of a series of events; a category above story	<b>Rhetoric</b> Persuasive speech or effective use of language
<b>Recap</b> Description of recent events	<b>Argument</b> Series of logical reasons, evidence intended to persuade
<b>Profile</b> Informational piece describing person or organization	<b>Testimonial</b> Statement attesting to individual, organization accomplishment, impact

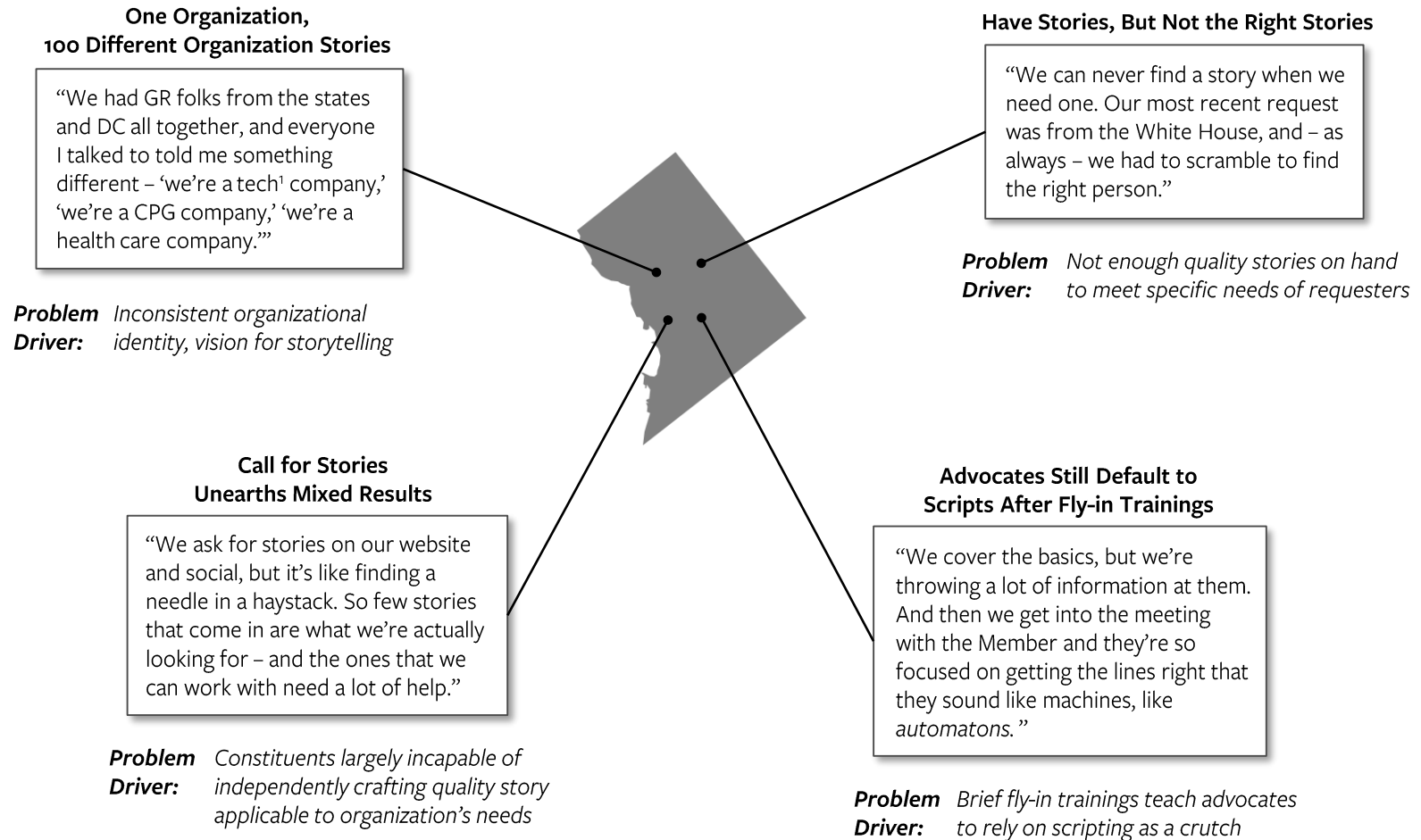
Story often serves as a component piece of different forms of discourse

# Facing Washington's High Standards...



# ...And Tripping Up

## Commonly Reported Challenges



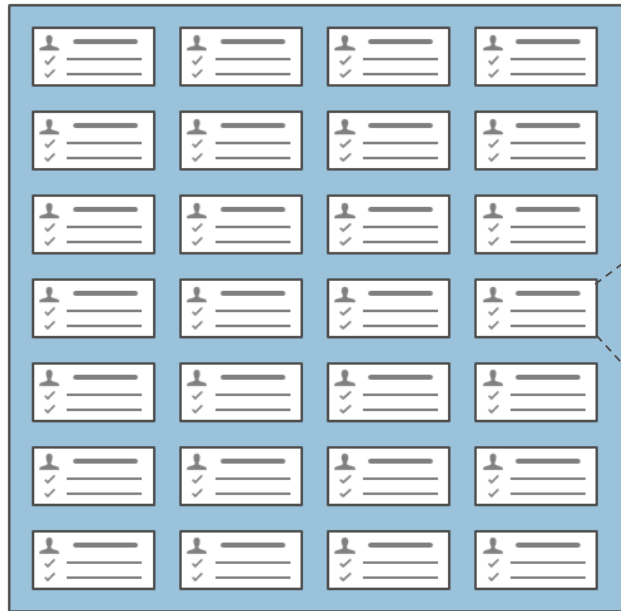
<sup>1</sup> Industry identifiers have been changed.

Source: National Journal Leadership Council interviews and analysis.


# Tapping a Deep Talent Roster

## *Storytelling Needs Matched to Storyteller Strengths*

### A “Roster” of Vetted Storytellers...



...for matching  
qualified storytellers...

 **Sophia Garner<sup>1</sup>**

- ☒ \$1,000,000+ annual sales
- ☒ Brick & mortar facility
- ☒ Strong conversationalist

Strengths  
documented for  
each storyteller

...with detailed requests

Requester: Govt. Rel.

Need: Annual fly-in

Preferred Characteristics:

1.	7-figure seller
2.	Physical storefront
3.	Easy to talk with

### Case in Brief



**Profiled Organization:** eBay Inc.

**Organization Type:** Corporation

- Grassroots director develops internal storyteller “talent agency” to meet rising demand of unique story requests emerging on the Hill; director takes inbound requests for storytellers from lobbyists, internal organizations
- 4-FTE Grassroots team builds storytelling talent roster through 4-month interview campaign of 1,000 individuals filtered out of company’s database of sellers; interviews surface issue-related stories (e.g., international trade), gauge candidates’ storytelling strengths



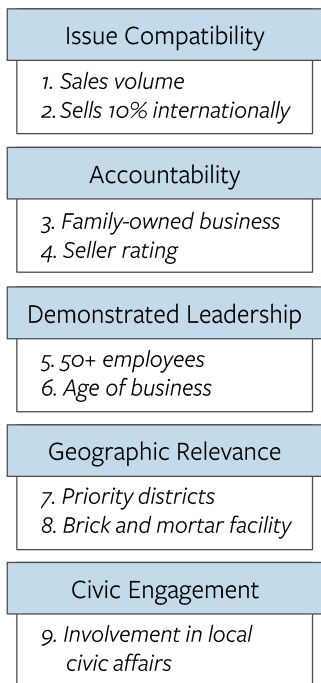
# Narrowing the Field

## Filtering Interview Candidates to a More Manageable (and Relevant) Group

### Initial Interview Candidate List Development

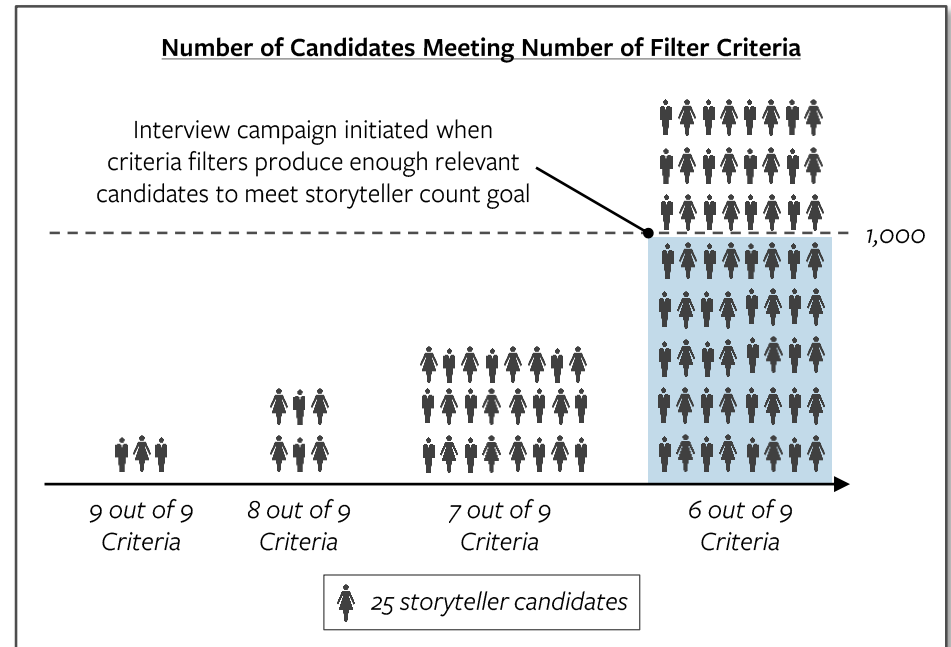
#### Seller Database Filtered for Indicators of Government Affairs Relevance

*Illustrative*



Number of indicators large enough to eliminate bad fits, small enough to surface enough viable candidates


#### Filter Criteria Ratio Reduced to Surface Sufficient Quantity of Candidates



# Surfacing Strengths

## Interview Questions Prompt Stories to Reveal Abilities

### Interview Questionnaire

 Government Relations

**eBay Marketplaces Interview Questionnaire**

*This questionnaire should be used when interviewing eBay sellers.*

**Background/General Info:**

1. Please tell me a little bit about yourself and your background?
2. How do you support your local community through your business?
3. Looking back 5 years, could you have imagined your business being where it is today?
4. What makes you energized/motivated to come to work every day?

**Connected Commerce:**

1. Can you think of an example or two of where, through your business, you have been able to connect meaningfully with people that you otherwise might not have connected with (i.e. customers, suppliers, other entrepreneurs, employees, etc.)?

**Cross Border Trade:**


1. What challenges have you faced with cross-border trade (shipping, customs, etc.)?
2. Can you remember any compelling trade stories (you sold a product to a country you weren't expecting, you found it ironic you sold a specific product to a specific country).
3. Have you formed any meaningful connections with customers around the world because of your ability to sell internationally?

Questions framed to prompt story answers, unearth storytelling strengths

Open-ended questions reveal connections to other relevant issues

### Storyteller Profile

*Illustrative*

 **Tina Johnson**  
Sparta, Tennessee – TN-6  
Rep. Diane Black; Sens. Alexander & Corker

☐ **Live Media Comments**  
Comments: *Tina seems less comfortable speaking before a crowd.*

☒ **Written Media**  
Comments: *Well-spoken, good voice for Op-Ed on trade issues.*

☒ **In-District, In-Person Meeting**  
Comments: *Good journey story, early eBay user with growing business.*

☒ **Fly-In**  
Comments: *Could handle pressure but don't need her district this year.*

☒ **Case Study**  
Comments: *Top-tier candidate, good for 1-pager. Highlight int'l sales.*

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**Issue Relevance**

<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Global Trade	<input type="checkbox"/> Net Neutrality	<input type="checkbox"/> Cybercrime
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Internet Sales Tax	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Postal Reform	<input type="checkbox"/> _____

### Top Storytellers Sell Themselves

“You can tell when an interview is going to go well because the advocate sells his or her own story. Good storytellers think their stories are cool and tell them in a way that makes me think so too.”

Federica Rabiolo  
Manager, Global Government Relations

# Elevating Storytelling's Impact

## *The Company's Best Storytelling Asset*

### A Robust Storytelling Enterprise

**520** Vetted storytellers in roster

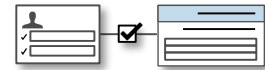
*Better  
Targeted Coverage*

### Elevating the Role, Stature of Storytelling

A Storyteller for  
Nearly Every District



Story Requests Matched  
to Storyteller Strengths



**5-8** Annual storytelling moments  
for each storyteller

*Proactive Storytelling for  
Higher Profile Uses*

Example Uses



Panel Discussions



TV Interviews



Member Tours



Letter Campaigns

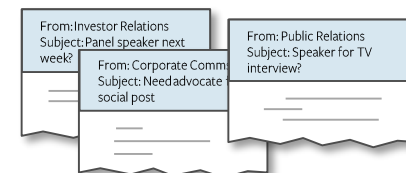


Town Halls

**1-3** Weekly requests from  
other departments

*Adding Business Value  
for the Entire Organization*

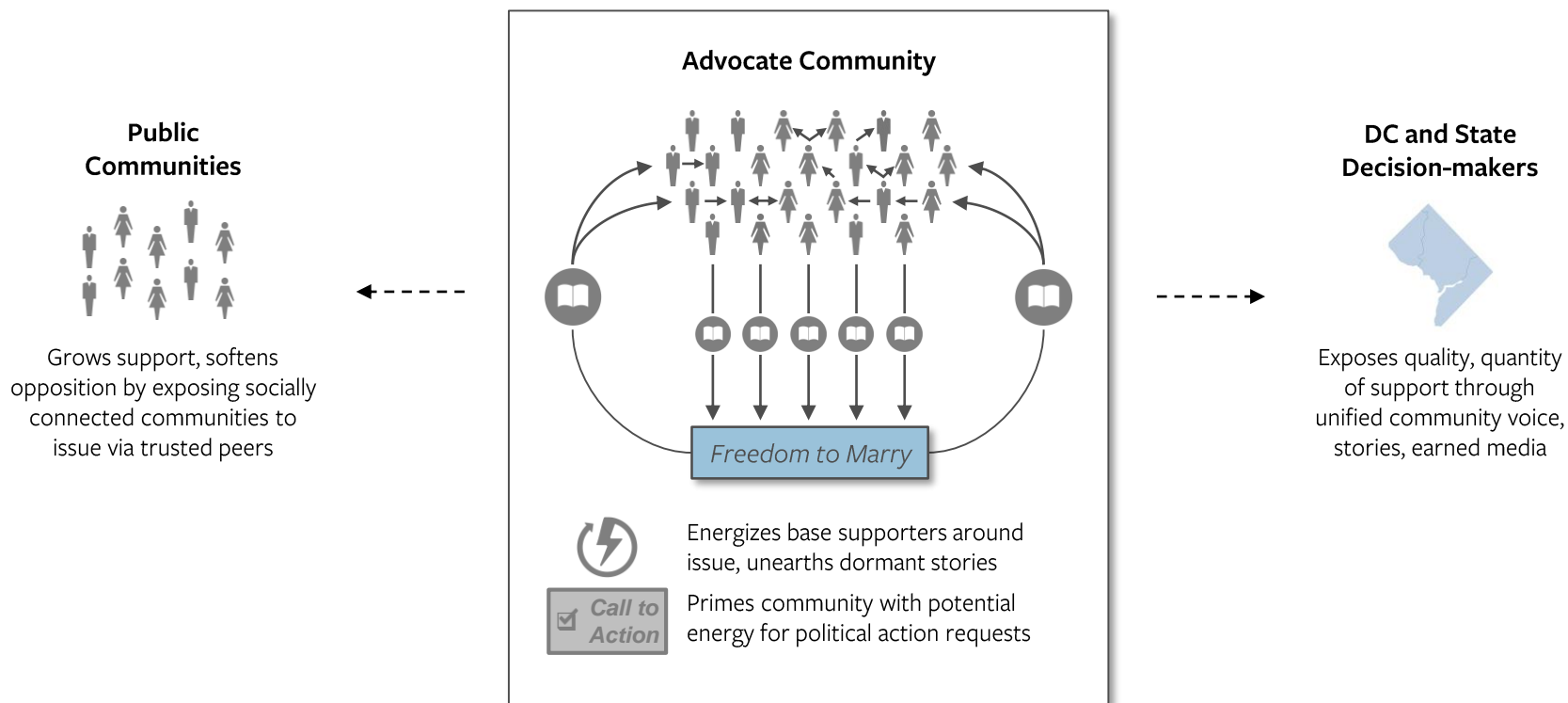
Departments Seeking  
Advocate Storytellers



# Charging a Community with Its Own Stories

## *Projecting Strength at Key Audiences*

### Story Journeys at Freedom to Marry



### Case in Brief



**Profiled Organization:** Freedom to Marry

**Organization Type:** Advocacy

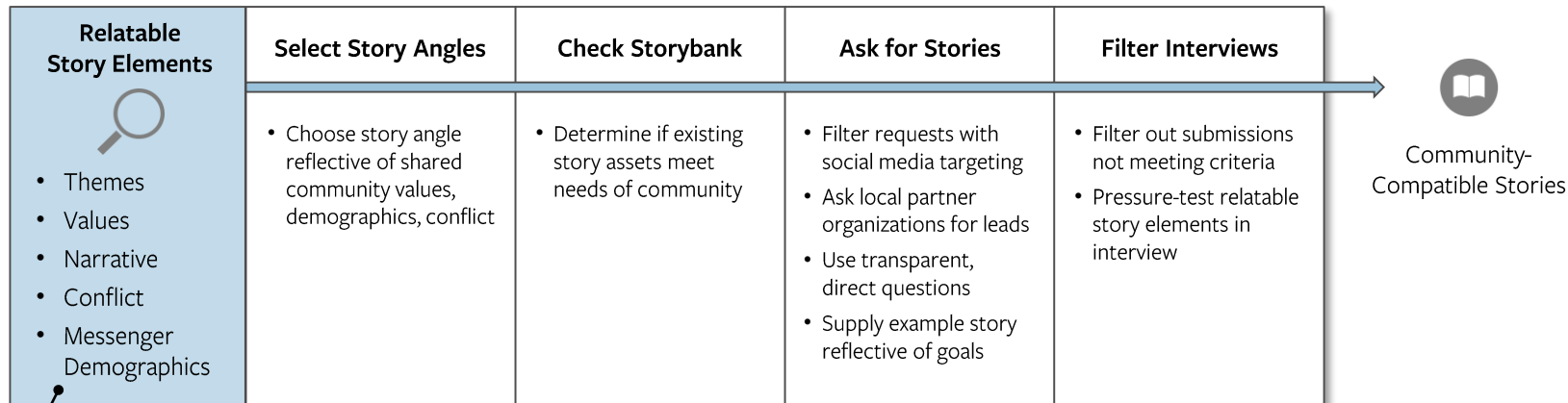
**Partner Organization:** Blue State Digital

- Organization collects, packages, distributes stories from advocate community back into community through social media, allies
- Community members identify with stories and share with others, building community energy around single issue
- Stories selected for shareability, relatability, relevance to political goals

# Matching the Right Story to the Right Community

## *Story Collection Process Surfaces Relatable Stories*

### Story Collection Process



Relatable story elements informed by campaign goal, issue, community characteristics

### Tagging System Surfaces Missing Relatable Elements in Storybank

#### Community Story Needs

- Female
- Military
- Southerner
- Family
- Narrative centered on love and commitment

#### Storybank

*Illustrative*

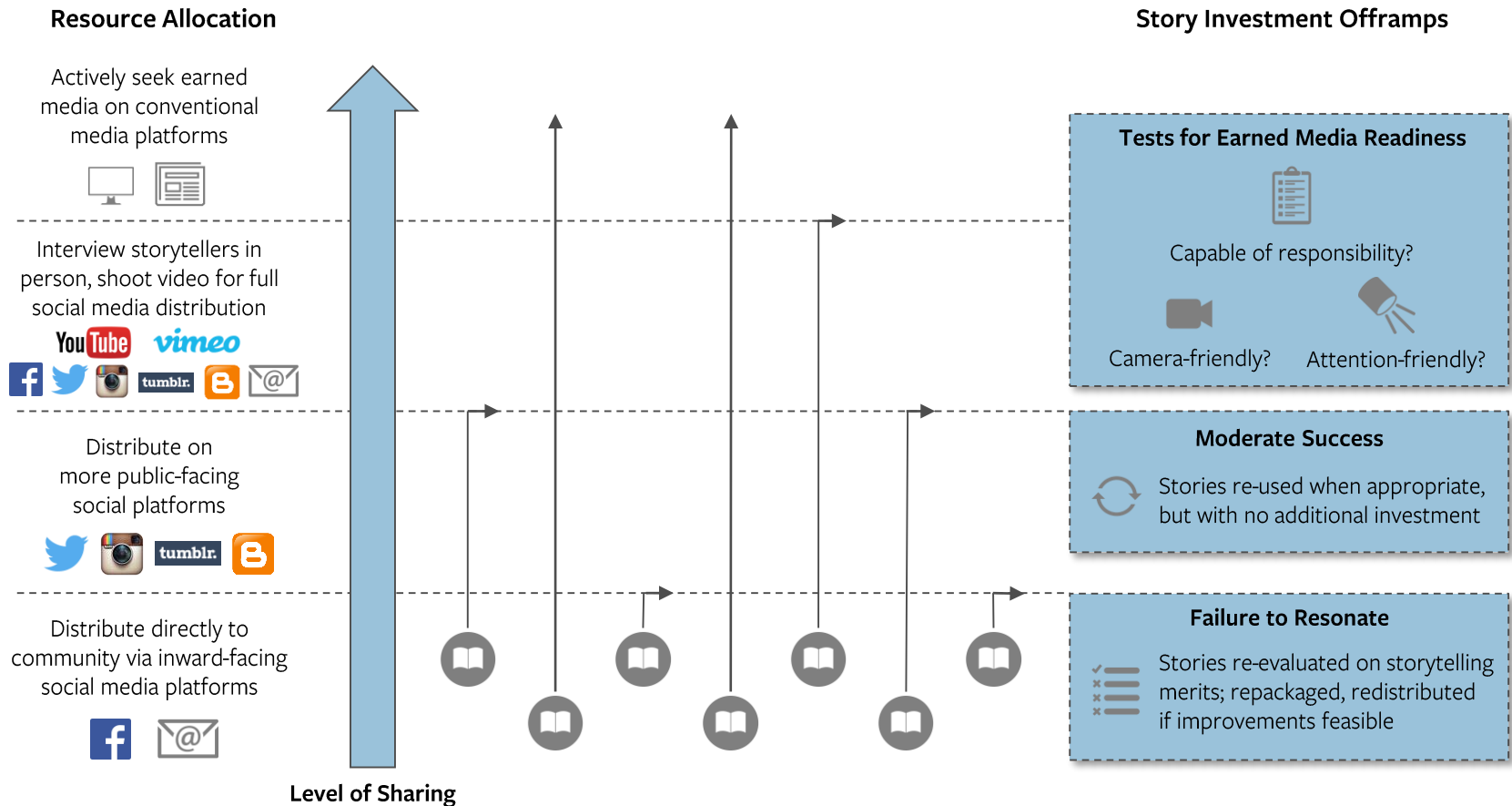
Story #47:	Female	Military	<del>Michigan</del>
Story #48:	Female	Military	<del>California</del>
Story #49:	<del>Male</del>	Military	Alabama

Tagging system tailored to relatable story elements to simplify searching process

# Letting the Community Pick Winning Stories

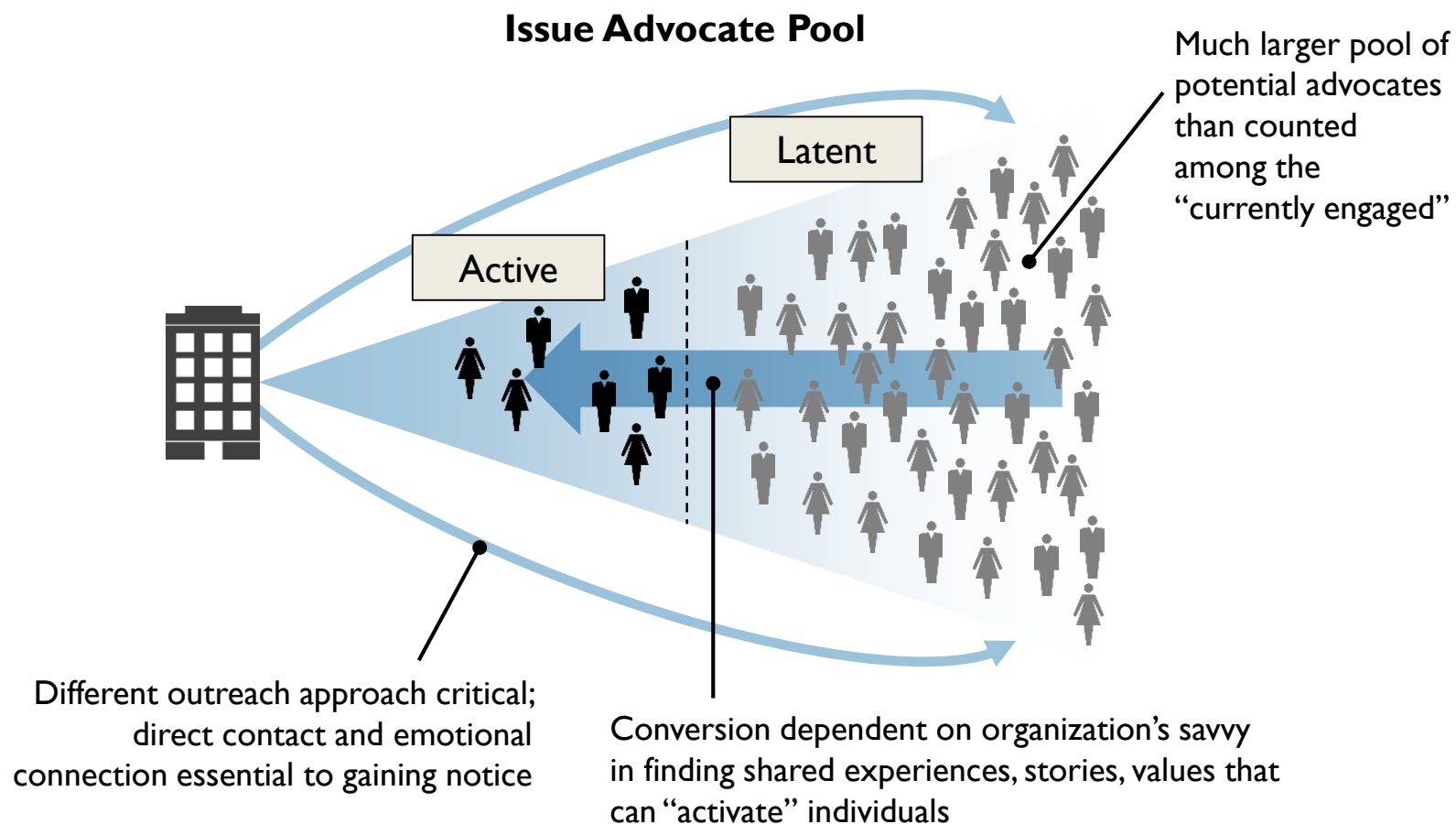
## *Most-Shared Stories Earn Additional Resource Investment*

### Investment in Stories Based on Level of Sharing



# Widening the Net for Grasstops Advocates

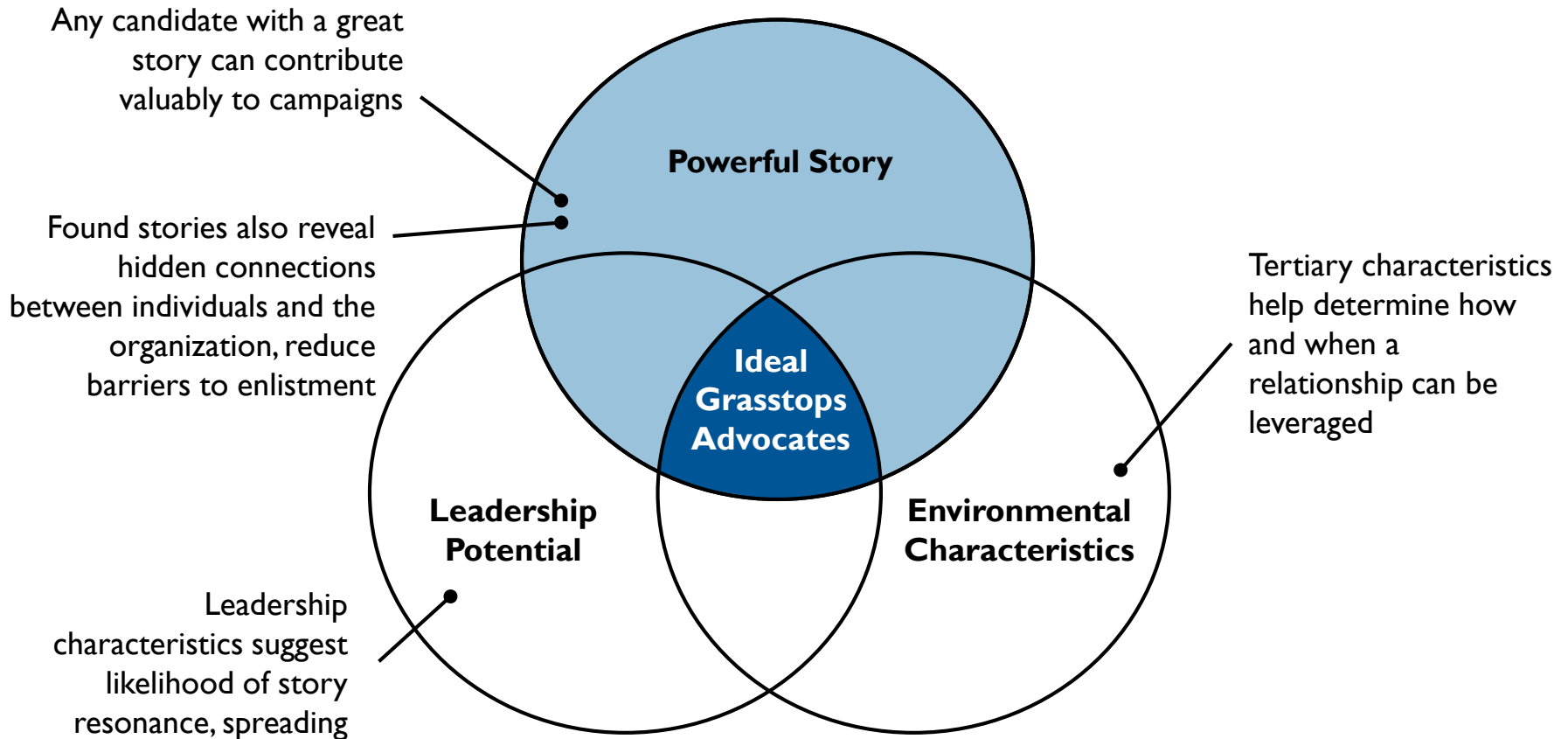
*Focusing on High-Potential Individuals*



# Defining the Ideal Advocate

*Keeping the Story at the Core*

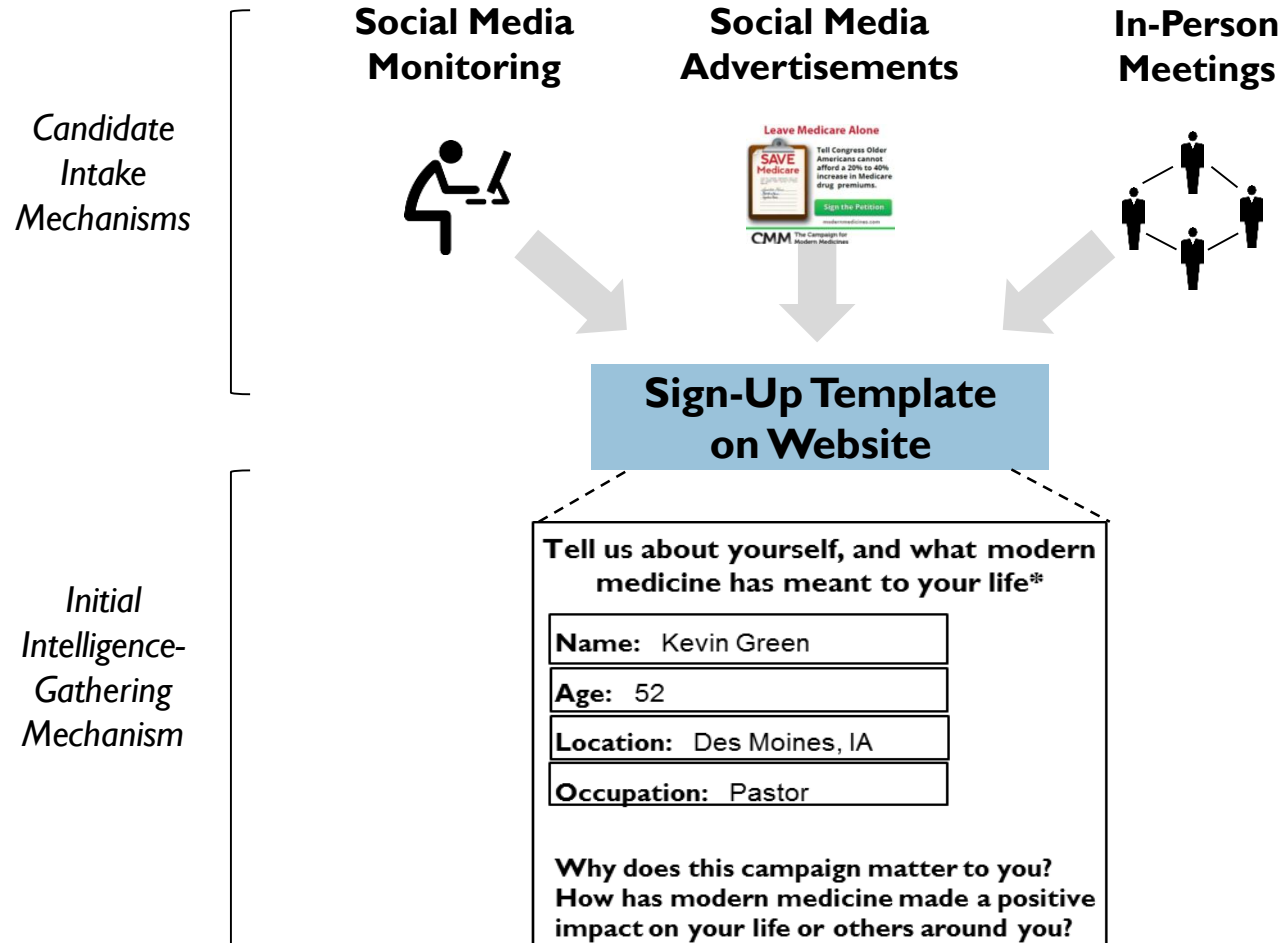
## Search Filter Guiding Candidate Evaluation





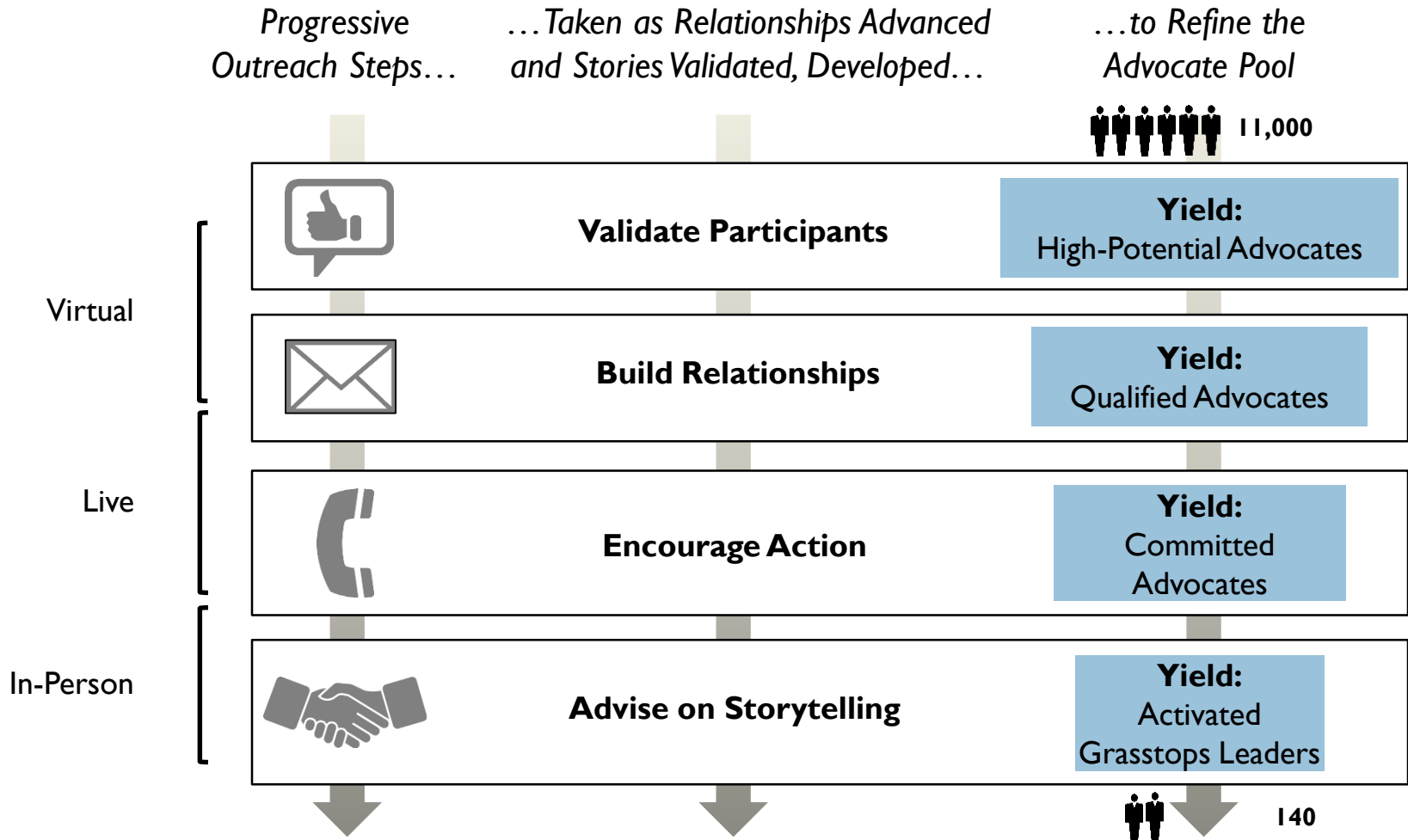
# Gathering Intelligence on Prospective Advocates

*Designing the Intake Mechanisms with Filters in Mind*



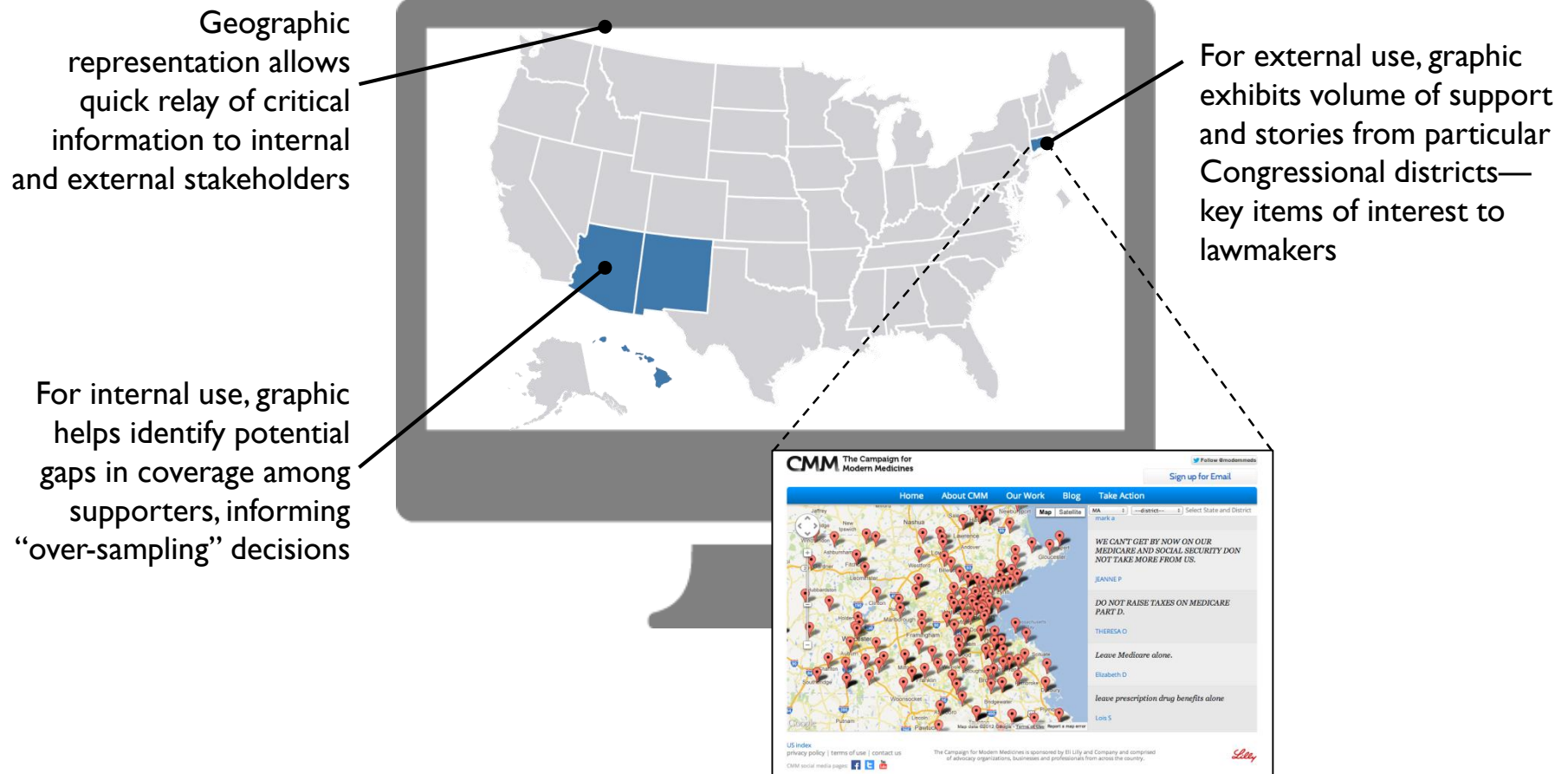
# Exploring Relationship Potential

## Candidate Vetting and Conversion Process



# Powerfully Illustrating Advocate Voice

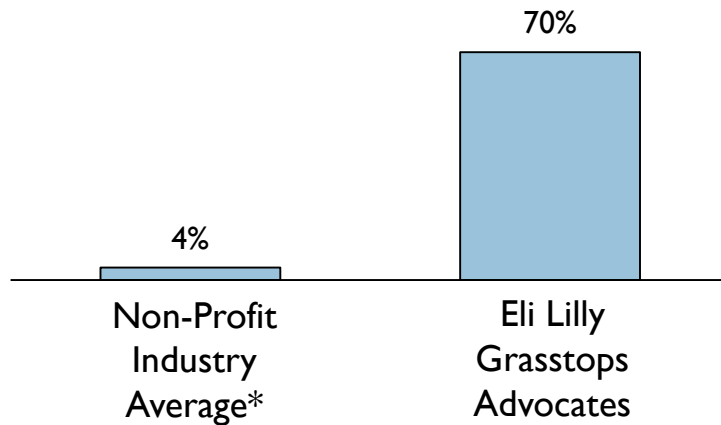
## *Visualizing Legislation Support Geographically*



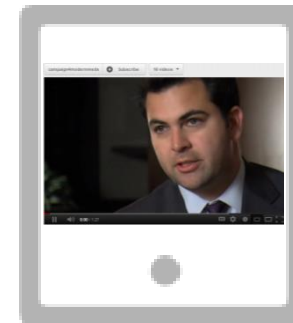
# Advancing the Agenda

## High Advocate Response Rates

*Fans Responding to Call to Action*



## High-Value Advocate Contributions



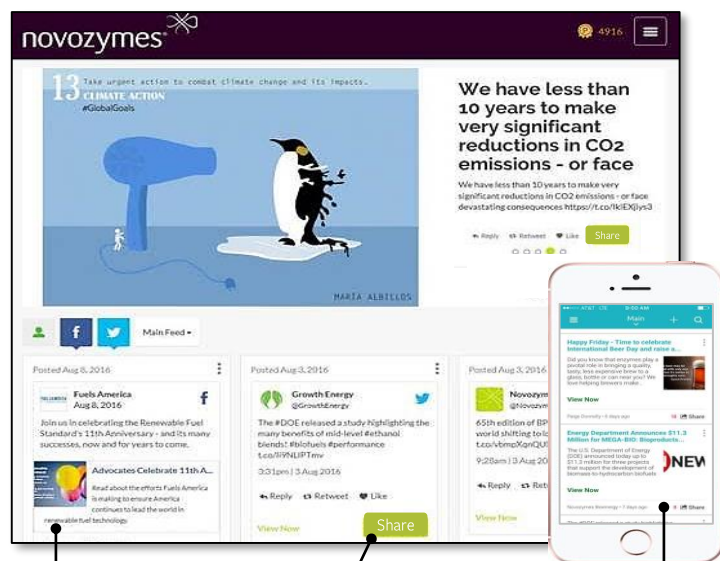
Tablet-friendly videos were created for use in meetings with Congressmen

70 Grasstops Advocate Videos Created

# Borrowing Advocates' Digital Voices

## Online Hub Arms Employee Ambassadors to Share Engaging Policy Content

### Novozymes Advocacy Content Hub Website



~60% of hub content curated from external websites

Shares content via ambassadors' personal social network accounts

Simple user experience eases burden of taking action

### Ambassador Uses of Online Hub

Learn Policy



Share Information with Peers



Connect with Fellow Ambassadors



Sign up for Offline Engagements



### Minimum Expectations for Ambassadors

- ☐ Post content from the hub to social media network a minimum of 2 times per month
- ☐ Participate in minimum of 1 offline advocacy event per calendar year

### Case in Brief



**Profiled Organization:** Novozymes

**Organization Type:** Corporation

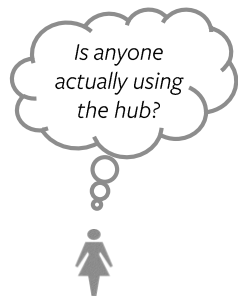
- Organization sets up an online content hub for a trusted group of highly engaged employee ambassadors
- Hub updates daily with opportunities for offline action and social-friendly content for ambassadors to read and share with their personal and professional online networks; ambassadors connect hub directly to their personal social media accounts
- Hub software Voicestorm offered by Dynamic Signal at cost of \$10 per user monthly

# Ensuring Participation

## *Elevating Visibility of Peer Contributions Drives Momentum*

### Actions Taken to Improve Visibility of Hub Community Activity

What your advocates  
are wondering...



#### Most Dedicated Candidates Enlisted First



25 most dedicated advocates  
recruited at hub launch to  
build community momentum

#### Friendly Competition Encouraged

##### Points for Activities

##### Scoring System

1. Share a post on social media 5
2. Share video on social media 20
3. Click on content you shared 1
4. Submit a post to the hub 5

Ambassadors earn points for  
each action taken within the  
hub and for offline advocacy

##### Scorekeeping

Member Leaderboard		
Since Jul 9, 2016		
#	Member	Points
15	You	849
1	Julia G.	6444
2	Jim B.	6258

Ambassadors see where they  
stack up relative to others in  
community on points leaderboard

#### Hub Content Refreshed Regularly



Advocacy manager adds new  
content daily to facilitate  
fresh experience every day

What you want them  
to be thinking...



## Appendix – Advice on Storytelling



NationalJournalLeadershipCouncil

# Witness the Five Deadly Sins of Washington Storytelling

*Narratives that Incorporate These Sins Risk Alienating Audiences—Or Worse*

## How the Organization Sins

## How the Audience Responds

### 1. Monotony

Nothing is at stake in the narrative.

“In 2010, the industry had strong financial standing. After our 2012 campaign, it continued to have strong financial standing.”



Bored

### 2. Pride

The organization becomes the central character in a story.

“We gave \$10,000. Without our donation, thousands would have gone hungry.”



Unimpressed

### 3. Subservience

The story’s only characters are organizational leaders.

“Vice President John Doe, as a father and veteran, knew how to solve the problem. He took action and ultimately saved the day.”



Skeptical

### 4. Detachment

The narrative is emotionally detached, or lacking in description.

“Jane saw a puppy. She picked it up. It barked.”



Indifferent

### 5. Pretension

A story uses technical explanations and industry jargon without defining these terms in plain language.

“The family’s two solar PV models’ MC4 connectors broke, leaving the home without energy.”



Dazed or Confused



# The Heart of Any Good Policy Story is an Individual

*But Too Many Organizations Prioritize the Issue—or Themselves*

## Representative Perspectives on Proper Story Focal Points

### Personal Arguments Trump Economic Ones

“If you can tell a personal story, tie it to an actual human being who is affected by the care—instead of necessarily linking it to employment—that is an easier way to cut through...it gives the Member a reason to go out there and become a champion.

Those stories give them the one-minutes on the floor or talking points at a press conference. The most effective messages are ones that go beyond economic impact and talk about the impact that they are having on people’s everyday lives. I’m not discounting the economics but the human element is more memorable.”

- Chief of Staff, House (D)

### Distinctions Between Corporations and People

“We hear all the time that some regulation is going to put a company out of business...Most people in government see corporations as not being people. I think the best way to get to that is to tell a good story, with real information, real facts. Otherwise there are a lot of people in government who don’t ever get past the corporate angle; this isn’t going to hurt that person at all, it’s just going to be the company.”

- Department of Labor

### Starting at the End

“There is a person at the end of the pipeline. There is a human being that is interacting with your product, or service or industry, and you start there. Not at the industry level, not the lobbyist level. Start at the person level.”

- Brad Fitch, Congressional Management Foundation

# Think Smaller Stories for Greater Issue Impacts

*Audiences are Compelled by the Relatable, Rather than the Dramatic*

## The Extreme



### The Setup

Man spends 10-12 hours per day commuting back and forth to work

### The Issue

Failed transit policy in metro Detroit

### The Outcome

A new car courtesy of Ford, and \$360K in donations from individuals

## The Everyday



Woman realizes she needs to relinquish driver's license after a near accident with children in her car

The effects of multiple sclerosis

Conversation & engagement on MS Connection, the MS Society's patient and caregiver portal

### Fixing the Person, or Fixing the Problem?

"The stories that really have a lot of impact are not the dramatic ones. They're the stories that are really pretty run-of-the-mill and that a lot of people can relate to. Often, if people hear a really dramatic story then they want to help that person, but if they hear a run-of-the-mill story that showcases a pretty average problem, then they want to fix that problem."

- Liz Prescott, Storybanking Consultant

# The First Thing to Go in Achieving Simplicity? Jargon.

*We Are Often the Worst Judges of Our Audiences' Desired Levels of Sophistication*

## What's Simple to Us



Organic agriculture, which is governed by strict government standards, requires that products bearing the organic label are produced without the use of toxic and persistent pesticides and synthetic nitrogen fertilizers, antibiotics, synthetic hormones, genetic engineering or other excluded practices, sewage sludge, or irradiation.

Organic farmers understand that what you put into the soil has a profound impact on what you get out of it. That is why they rely on such practices as hand weeding, mechanical control, mulches, cover crops, crop rotation and dense planting, rather than toxic and persistent pesticides, herbicides, and synthetic nitrogen fertilizers, to enrich the soil in which they grow their crops.

They recognize that doing so provides plants with the nutrients they need to grow. Plus, it enables the absorption of major and micro-nutrients like Vitamin C, resulting in a higher nutrient content and often a better tasting crop.

VS.

## What's Simple to Them



The difference between organic oats and conventional is they spray and we till.

- Brian Krumm, Clif Bar Oat Farmer

## Are We Too Paternalistic?

"Sometimes we get too caught up in the information we're trying to deliver to somebody, and forget that we're trying to inform them in an entertaining way. We're trying to jam a story down someone's throat and give them all the details and all the background and depth, and we don't trust our audiences enough to fill in the gaps and form their own conclusions."

Colin Moffett, Managing Partner, Artemis Ward

# A Primer on Turning Sins into Virtues

## *Simple Narrative Changes Can Translate Into Big Audience Engagement Gains*

### Storytelling Virtues Replace Sins

### How to Make Them Habits

#### 1. Instead of Monotony, Adventure

The narrative has unexpected events, and its characters face challenges.

Monotony: “In 2010, the industry had strong financial standing. After our 2012 campaign, it continued to have strong financial standing.”

Adventure: “In 2010, the industry had strong financial standing, but in 2011, new regulations put all of that into jeopardy.”



#### Practice “But Then” Narratives

If your story can’t be summed up with the sentence “\_\_\_\_\_ happened but then \_\_\_\_\_ happened and it became better/worse,” then rewrite it.

#### 2. Instead of Pride, Humility

The organization recognizes the humanity and influence of the people they serve.

Pride: “We gave \$10,000. Without our donation, thousands would have gone hungry.”

Humility: “Jane knew her family would starve if she didn’t act quickly.”



#### Put Your Message Last

Before there can be a solution, there has to be a problem. Paint a complete picture of an issue then close with the organization’s involvement.

#### 3. Instead of Subservience, Independence

The story is three-dimensional, drawing from voices in and out of the organization.

Subservience: “Vice President John Doe, as a father and veteran, knew how to solve the problem. He took action and ultimately saved the day.”

Independence: “Jim Smith, a father and veteran helped by the program, says he felt that the actions of VP John Doe and others helped his family. Jane Smith, his wife, agrees.”



#### Develop Relationships Outside of the Organization

Over time, these people may become sources.

# A Primer on Turning Sins into Virtues (cont'd)

## *Simple Narrative Changes Can Translate Into Big Audience Engagement Gains*

### Storytelling Virtues Replace Sins

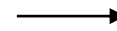
### How to Make Them Habits

#### 4. Instead of Detachment, Compassion

The narrative reflects the thoughts and feelings of its main characters.

Detachment: "Jane saw a puppy. She picked it up. It barked."

Compassion: "Jane saw a puppy, alone and neglected. She picked it up, and her heart leapt as she looked into its sad eyes and it gave a little yip."



#### Always Ask "Why"

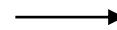
People are motivated by their thoughts and feelings. We need to understand motive to understand actions.

#### 5. Instead of Pretension, Education

A story's language is easy to understand for all audiences. Any difficult terms are explained.

Pretension: "The family's two solar PV models' MC4 connectors broke, leaving the home without energy."

Education: "The family's two solar panels broke, leaving the home without energy."



#### Prepare Definitions for Commonly-Used Jargon

Keep them handy so you can be ready with an easy explanation

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